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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KAPTANOGLU SHIPPING COMPANY

Ref: Haywood/Sirotic 12/2/04 Email

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please Handle Accordingly.

1. (SBU) Per ref email, Embassy understands that the Coast Guard is calling an inter-agency meeting for Monday, December 8 to consider imposing a moratorium preventing Kaptanoglu Shipping Group (KSG) vessels from entering U.S. waters/ports, as well as other measures, due to the company's record of absconders/deserters and its failure to respond to a September 30 Coast Guard instruction to implement added security measures on its ships. Embassy supports the measures proposed in ref email.

2. (U) So as to avoid any surprises, we have kept the Turkish MFA informed about KSG's problems since July. Most recently, we reiterated to the MFA December 3 that the company continued to be unresponsive to U.S. concerns and that concrete measures could be implemented in the near future. Basat Ozturk, head of the MFA Maritime Department, promised to contact both KSG as well as relevant Turkish agencies to urge the company to comply with U.S. requirements immediately.

3. (U) In response to information about KSG absconders and deserters, Embassy and Consulate Istanbul reviewed crew visa issuance to persons affiliated with KSG. The company has not participated in special crew visa issuance programs for a long time. However, our consular sections found that absconding/desertion has been a problem with a number of other companies, and has decided to require certain shipping companies to provide a plan of remedial action prior to issuing any further visas to their crews.

4. (U) Kaptanoglu Shipping Group is a family business established in 1904 that currently operates seven motor vessels of various sizes and capacities. The company is primarily a ship operator, meaning that six of the seven vessels currently operating in the Kaptanoglu fleet are owned by other companies. KSG is responsible for operating and managing the crews of the vessels it sails. See www.kaptanoglu.com for further background on KSG.

5. (SBU) Cengiz Kaptanoglu, a member of the Managing Board of the H. Ismail Kaptanoglu Companies Group, is an influential figure. A Member of Parliament from the ruling AK party, Kaptanoglu chairs the Defense Committee. He is also the President of the Managing Board of the Maritime Trade Chamber. In discussing the KSG case with Econoff, Ozturk alluded to Kaptanoglu's influence by saying that, if a moratorium were imposed, there could be media attention in the case.

6. (SBU) Embassy recommendation: In the absence of KSG remedial measures, Embassy fully supports the Coast Guard's proposed moratorium and other measures to maintain homeland security. Noting that MP Kaptanoglu is in a position of influence on defense-related policy matters in Turkey, we suggest giving the Turkish MFA an additional week to address the issue directly with the company.
Edelman